Children of Immigrants: Discrimination, Social Support and Behavior Problems

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Introduction

- 24% of American children younger than age eight are born to immigrant parents (Hernández, Takanishi, & Marotz, 2006).
- Children of immigrant parents face prejudice that pose a risk to their psychological health but may also benefit from protective factors, such as social support or positive school settings.

Risk: Perceived Discrimination

- Is the awareness of mistreatment attributed to one’s identities.
- Is a chronic stressor for immigrant families, but research is limited.
- Is linked to maladaptive outcomes, such as stress, impaired academic performance and negative psychological outcomes.

Protective Factors: School Setting & Social Support

- School setting
  - Impacts a child’s environment through policies, values, and cultural congruence with family setting.
- Social Support
  - Is an effective protective agent for immigrant groups.
  - Immigrant families have different levels of support for their children’s educational needs.
- Children of immigrants in religious schools might perceive less discrimination and higher cultural homogeneity.

Research Questions

1. What is the relation between behavioral problems of immigrant children and their parents’ experience of discrimination?
2. Does social support moderate the relation between perceived discrimination (PD) and behavioral problems for children of immigrants?

Perceived Discrimination

- Does PD, social support, and behavioral problems differ between public school and Islamic school students?

Method

- Participants
  - The Longitudinal Immigrant Families and Teachers Study (LIFTS) collected data from 2006 to 2009.
  - Data for this study came from 2009 (Wave 3 of LIFTS), collected from parents of 103 students.
  - 52% of children were female.
  - All children were enrolled in third grade.
  - All children had at least one parent who was foreign-born.
  - All children had at least one parent who was fluent in English.
  - 46% were students in Islamic schools and 54% were students in public schools.

Procedure

- Self-report questionnaires were mailed to parents and collected by return mail or through school teachers.
- Participating parents received $20 as an incentive.

Measures

- Variable
  - Scale
  - Construct
  - 

Descriptives & Group Differences

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<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Public Schools</th>
<th>Islamic Schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n = 40)</td>
<td>(n = 54)</td>
<td>(n = 56)</td>
<td>(n = 47)</td>
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<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>3.65 (3.86)</td>
<td>2.38 (3.43)</td>
<td>2.63 (3.66)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>1.79 (0.92)</td>
<td>1.63 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.68 (0.80)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBCL Score</td>
<td>48.93 (18.94)</td>
<td>43.70 (15.66)</td>
<td>45.10 (16.04)</td>
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<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION</th>
<th>SOCIAL SUPPORT</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS</th>
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Discussion

- Perceived discrimination was associated with behavior problems but did not vary across school settings, nor did social support moderate this relationship. However, social support was a key protective factor for immigrant children in public schools.
- Due to the possible lack of cultural congruence between home and school environments, children from immigrant families attending public schools seem to benefit from higher levels of external social support as they display fewer behavior problems.
- In comparison, parents whose children attend Islamic schools might already be relying on in-built support available at the school. Thus, external social support resources are not as necessary.
- Findings from the present study validate the influence of parental experiences on the behavioral outcomes of immigrant children.
- Future studies might improve the external validity by recruiting participants from wider geographical regions, using a larger sample, improving scale validity and incorporating multi-informant data points.

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